

Lincoln Essay Competition TOPIC 2021:

The 1776 Declaration of Independence proclaims:

"We hold these truths to be self-evident: that all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights; that among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness."

In 1858, while running for the US Senate, Abraham Lincoln implored listeners to return to the founding document:

...if you have been taught doctrines conflicting with the great landmarks of the Declaration of Independence; if you have listened to suggestions which would take away from its grandeur, and mutilate the fair symmetry of its proportions; if you have been inclined to believe that all men are not created equal in those inalienable rights enumerated by our chart of liberty, let me entreat you to come back. *(August 17, 1958; Lewiston, Illinois)*

Now, in 2021, we ask you to focus on “the unalienable rights” in the Declaration by answering the following prompt:

Choose one issue that you think demonstrates how our nation either is or is not honoring the ideal that all people have the right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. Give three examples to support your position. Finally, suggest one step that could either further strengthen our course or get our nation back on track and explain why this step would be effective.

Congratulations to the 2021 Hildene Lincoln Essay Competition winners!

We received 124 applications from all over Vermont. A first, second, and third place winner was chosen from each of four regions and two honorable mentions were selected from the combined pool of finalists. If you are one of the applicants, whether or not your essay garnered an award, you are to be congratulated. It was clear to all the judges that every single one of you put a lot of thought, time and effort into your writing.

Students advocated for a wide range of actions they thought should be taken to address issues which keep the United States from fully honoring its founding principles. They responded to the prompt: *Choose one issue that you think demonstrates how our nation either is or is not honoring the ideal that all people have the right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. Give three examples to support your position. Finally, suggest one step that could either further strengthen our course or get our nation back on track and explain why this step would be effective.*

As always, essays were submitted anonymously to the judges. The panel assessed them on content, the student's understanding of the subject and their ability to convey that understanding using good writing practices including style, composition, grammar and factual accuracy. Hildene applauds all who participated in the competition.

All participants will receive a letter in the mail, along with guest passes to visit Hildene. We hope you will all come and enjoy the many pleasures that Hildene's 214 bucolic acres have to offer. On behalf of Hildene and all of the LEC judges, I thank you for tackling this year's prompt. The range of ideas and solutions proposed were impressive and thought-provoking. May your efforts inspire you to continue to hone your communication skills and to remain civically engaged. I have no doubt that your contributions will make the world an even better place.

Sincerely,



Stephanie Moffett-Hynds
Programming Director

2021 WINNERS

REGION ONE:

**Grand Isle, Franklin, Orleans, Essex, Lamoille,
Caledonia, Washington Counties**

FIRST PLACE, \$500

Edith Lane

Edith wrote, "To ensure the LGBTQ+ community feels seen and heard, we must teach about LGBTQ+ issues in schools to dismantle biases and stereotypes."

U32 Middle School, Montpelier; Teacher: Mary Bove

SECOND PLACE, \$400

Josie Haley

Josie wrote about the need to eliminate systemic oppression of people who identify as LGBTQ+, saying, "It is our job to protect people from getting hurt and make acceptance the foundation of our future."

U32 Middle School, Montpelier; Teacher: Katie Staley

THIRD PLACE, \$300

Elly Budliger

Elly addressed systemic racism and police brutality, advocating for antiracism training for prospective officers and an expanded antiracism curriculum in schools.

U32 Middle School, Montpelier; Teacher: Mary Bove

REGION TWO:

Chittenden County

FIRST PLACE, \$500

Penelope deRosset

Penelope advocates for an overhaul of the US justice system, saying that America could better uphold its values if its prisons were more like Norway's prisons which focus more on rehabilitation than punishment.

Edmunds Middle School, Burlington; Teacher: Jeremy DeMink

REGION TWO, cont.

SECOND PLACE, \$400

Nikolas Homan

Nikolas advocates for better treatment of migrant workers, writing, “Our communities have a responsibility to ensure that all laborers, documented or not, have reasonable hours, a safe work environment, access to medical treatment, and minimum wage.”

Edmunds Middle School, Burlington; Teacher: Terence Landberg

THIRD PLACE, \$300

Elizabeth Cunningham

Elizabeth believes that, in all states, the records of minors should be sealed. Otherwise, the records can follow them throughout their lives, constantly shutting doors on opportunities to move ahead. She writes, “childhood mistakes do not define a person, and neither should their record.”

Edmunds Middle School, Burlington; Teacher: Jeremy DeMink

**REGION THREE:
Addison, Rutland, Bennington Counties**

FIRST PLACE, \$500

Sienna Halstead

Sienna outlines many steps that should be taken to address systemic racism, writing, “the wealth gap between Black and White Americans, police brutality targeted at Black people, and racial inequalities in the education systems all show how systemic racism still frustrates” American ideals.

The Dorset School, Dorset; Teacher: Katherine Monahan

SECOND PLACE, \$400

Erin Geisler

Erin addresses the gender pay gap, writing, “we must make salary and job description reports mandatory for all businesses, especially in the private sector.”

Rutland Town School, Rutland; Teacher: Peter Patterson

THIRD PLACE, \$300

TIE: Josephine Monder

Josephine writes, “In the pursuit of life, liberty, and happiness, our country needs to recognize the inequality between rural and urban internet services. If rural communities can’t obtain high speed internet, they will be left behind in our modern world.”

Long Trail School, Dorset; Teacher: Deb MacDonald

REGION THREE, cont.

THIRD PLACE, \$300

TIE: Margaret Orten

Margaret addresses widespread systemic racism in the US, writing, “To some, America’s truths are that all are entitled to ‘life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.’ To others, that translates more directly to death, incarceration, and the pursuit of whatever’s left.”

Middlebury Union Middle School, Middlebury; Teacher: Sara Nadeau

**REGION Four:
Orange, Windsor, Windham Counties**

FIRST PLACE, \$500

Owen Parker

Owen argues that the US needs to continue to work on providing equality to the transgender community. He sees education as one of the keys to erasing stigma. Owen explains, “We need to teach children at a young age that there is nothing wrong with letting people be themselves.”

Hartford Memorial Middle School, White River Junction; Teacher: Jennifer Boeri-Boyce

SECOND PLACE, \$400

Unandi Lungu

Unandi is a strong supporter of the Diversity Visa Lottery Program, the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program, and the US Refugee Admissions Program, and advocates for an increase in the immigrant and refugee admission rate.

Randolph Union Middle/High School, Randolph; Teacher: Brian Kennedy

THIRD PLACE, \$300

Amelia Marshal

Amelia writes about the importance of education to remove the stigma surrounding mental illness, so that people with mental disorders will not feel like outcasts.

White River Valley Middle School, Bethel; Teacher: Marie Kittel

HONORABLE MENTIONS

HONORABLE MENTIONS, \$200 each

Bowie Creason

Bowie advocates for stronger firearms restrictions, writing, “If the US prohibits semi-automatic and automatic guns, institutes a gun buyback program, and has heightened background checks, fewer people will die...a step towards fulfilling America’s promise to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness for all of its citizens.”

Edmunds Middle School, Burlington; Teacher: Carole Renca, librarian

Grace Maley

Grace advocates for a \$15 minimum wage, writing that the current federal rate is only \$7.25/hour. “This isn’t enough money to achieve life, liberty, and happiness, or even enough money to survive.”

Edmunds Middle School, Burlington; Teacher: Jane Lavigne